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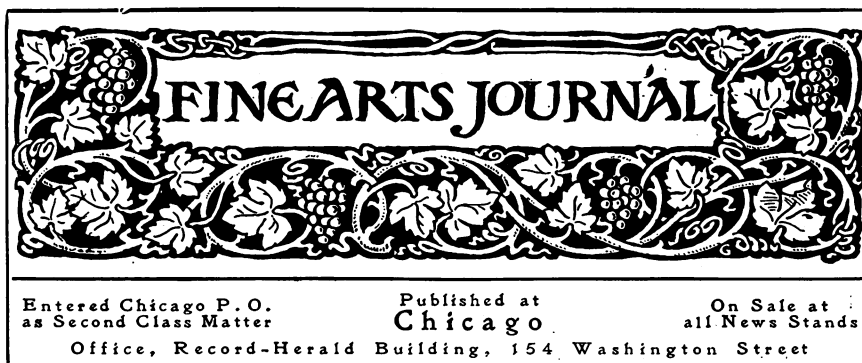
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"THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH OVER ERROR"

BY HENRY B. FULLER



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A NEW RELIGIOUS ART

By HENRY B. FULLER



THE Founder of Christian Science, in an editorial in the Christian Science Sentinel of October 19, 1907, bestowed favorable notice upon a picture, entitled "The Triumph of Truth Over Error," this picture being the first considerable work so far painted with the aim to portray the thought of Christian Science. Praise accorded the picture by Mrs. Eddy is, therefore, the highest honor to which a work of like nature could attain. But her gracious comment carries more than a personal gratification to the painter; it offers a spiritual encouragement to an art expressive of divine thought.

It has long been clear to me that among the other blessings Christian Science bestows upon mankind, the inspiration for a new and vital art is not the least; an art which shall convey to the world the healing thought embodied in Christian Science, an art of beauty expressive of her own exalted ideals; an art which though still in a potential state and hardly yet brought into consciousness, will soon unfold fair wings in the serene atmosphere of faith. I will endeavor to explain with what clearness I make the grounds whereon I base this prediction.

Primarily, my faith in the evolution of an art created by Christian Science arises from the perception that the essence of art, in the purest meaning of the term, and the truth of Christian Science are identical; that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," according to the famous line of Keats. Spiritual beauty is the truth of art. Is it not the truth of divine thought, too? Symmetry, the desire of all nature, the will of God manifest in all things, is the final prayer of the soul; is religion. Symmetry, in propor-

tion as it permeates a work of art, elevates it to a religious symbol. Art and religion unite in symmetry.

A faith whose doctrine is simplicity, absolute being, pure mind, must possess an emotional life derived from the intense consciousness of divine thought; and the rational expression of this emotion must be beauty. The contemplation of harmony inspires harmony of expression and rejects what is inharmonious as inexpressive. Christian Science being such a faith, the expression of its thought must be in terms of pure art, or unalloyed symmetry.

Here we come upon a new note in Christian art, as I will show later, but at first glance this new note will recall the note of Greek art. The psychology of Christian Science differentiates it, however. Greek art was cold, intellectual. Christian Science, through consciousness of absolute being, through conquest of the illusions of sense, is enthusiastic. It has a purpose, a mission of good. And the warmth of this enthusiasm must betray itself in art.

This brings us to another element in Christian Science. The art of overcoming the illusions of sense is dramatic. It is this element I have chosen to represent in the picture mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Here then, we have an art of symmetry, enthusiastic in its emotion, with a dramatic element. I would call attention to the fact that the very ideal abstractions of Christian Science are an artistic advantage, as the Greek art amply proves. The ideal of harmony, of perfection, conceived with religious enthusiasm, will inevitably mould an original art of universal appeal.

Next to this advantage of this formative inspiration in Christian Science, there is a negative one of great importance. These ideals have no traditions to hamper their harmony of expression, such as overload the art of the middle ages,—as particular scenes, costumes, forms of architecture, and so on. The artist is free in his choice of elements for his work. The originality of this art, human in its impulse, divine in its susceptibility to harmony, will be readily understood by considering the nature of previous Christian art. Here we find the reverse in most particulars of that which I have endeavored to describe. An historical art from the beginning, its highest achievement and most original development was portraiture. It was literal in its endless representations of suffering—on the one side a purgatorial art; on the other an art of aspiration, according as it obeyed its twofold master, future reward or future punishment.

The inevitable gloom of that monstrous alliance of the powers of heaven and hell as a tenet of the Church rendered it impossible to introduce beauty continuously and uninterruptedly. Historical in aim, it hence was an art of incidents rather than of principles, of individual traits, localized particulars.

The Church, persecuted as it was through the early ages, seeking an outlet to her emotion, brought a new art to light. Crude at first, it was

instinct with such moving human sympathy and power that it grew into the chief form of religious expression. For centuries it brought hope and balm to the stricken in spirit with its promise of future beatitude to the faithful. And to-day, centuries after the life that informed it has died out, we still feel its grandeur, though it speaks to us no longer in its particular tongue, but with the immemorial meaning of the beauty there is in it. Redemption through faith, the aspiration of the soul quickened by the hope of a beatific eternity, and the recognition of a malignant force, endowed with individual life, are among its salient features. The element of beauty, of ideality, found expression through the motives of the Virgin, the divine Child, the assumption of the Virgin, and paradise, —with their note of comfort and love; a necessary antithesis to scenes of martyrdom and asceticism. But these motives were treated rather historically or sentimentally than from the standpoint of pure art.

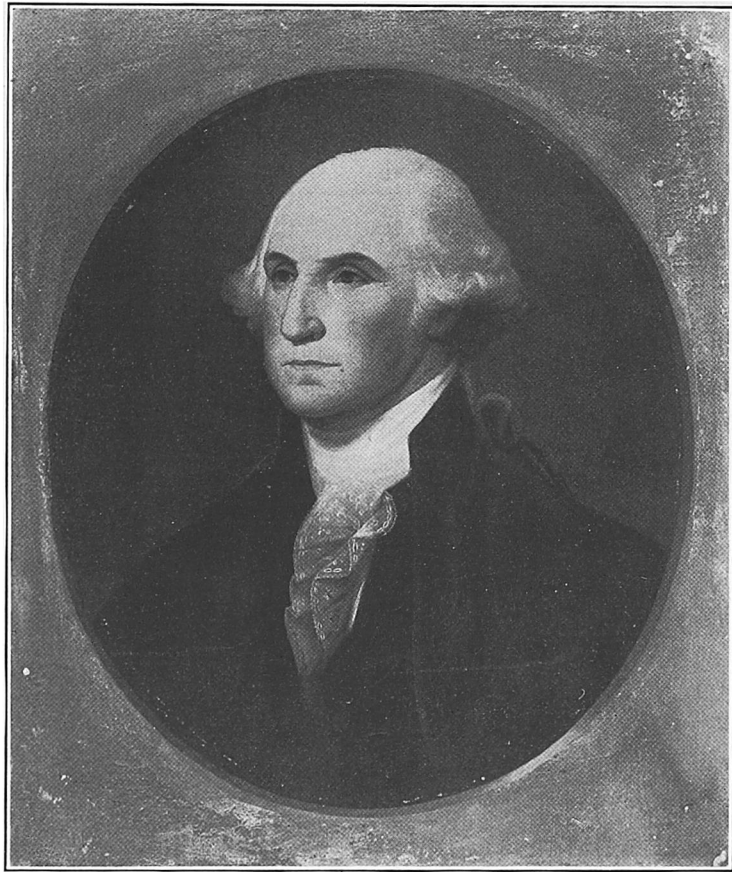
Volumes have been filled with dissertations on the wonderful art of the middle ages, and it is not my purpose to more than point out the difference in impulse between that art and the impulse that would form a Christian Science art. The one is personal, historical; the other would be distinctly the art of principle, hospitable to beauty, less romantic, more classic.

Under the spell of the emotion that shaped it, the art of aspiration is no longer creative. Its miracles are past. It has indirectly given rise to a secular art, much of it of the highest merit, an expansion of the individualistic spirit in modern life. This art, however, has not the construction or the comprehensive interest which religion alone can give it. We are familiar with three religious arts: that of Egypt, expressing the thought of eternity; of Greece, expressing reason; of the middle ages, expressing individualism and aspiration. After the latter, what is left for a new faith to adopt as its vesture of beauty?

Christian Science brings the answer: it is the art of fulfillment, of being, of divine thought. The art that most clearly embodies the faith of Christian Science will be the new religious art, with an appeal wider, stronger, saner, more joyous and beautiful than the old Christian art, marred as it was with its belief in the power of evil. Affirmation will be the master note in this new expression of a faith enfranchised from the power of illusion. Instead of a restricted introduction of harmony, harmony will be everywhere dominant. Instead of heaven afar off, with pain and suffering near, it will depict a sublimated state, a state of heavenly being, consonant with a just conception of the divine nature. Divine Love, triumph, enthusiasm, the conceptions of an advancing, widening humanity, the present possibilities of an improved moral and physical state, will find a place in this new art. With the faith and energy of a large and increasing host behind them, these ideals must inevitably blossom in forms of exalted beauty. The spirit of life, the all conquering spirit, will carry expression upward into its own reality.

It will be understood that in attempting to define the nature and

quality of a subject so vast as the fresh awakening of religious emotion, into art form, that little more than the direction and purport of the expanding sentiment can be indicated. A Christian Science art must inevitably be an art of symmetry, or eternal law, of beauty, in so far as it is distinctive. The value of such an art as the fundamental thought of Christian Science would inspire cannot be estimated. The Church would not alone benefit by it, but everywhere it would be welcomed as the synthesis, the psychic exegesis of modern life. Beauty springs from the center of being. Where she goes she is ever a royal guest. There are no barriers to deter her. No creed can confine her. She is the best in every soul; and every soul joyfully acknowledges her supremacy.



GEORGE WASHINGTON

By Rembrandt Peale